228 factors which govern their value, in addition to specific gravity. The principal colours are white, pink, yellow or gold, blue, grey and black. Black pearls (called by the Arabs 'dead' pearls) are usually dull and of impure colour; they generally crack after a year or more. Few black pearls of high value have been found in the Gulf, the finest varieties coming from Mexico. All the black pearls that I saw were no larger than seed pearls. Parti-coloured pearls are not uncommon; they are mostly black or brownish, with white or bluish variegations.

Besides pearls of spherical or pear-shaped form, symmetrical probably because they have developed in a soft medium, malformed pearls of various types occur in the Persian Gulf as they do elsewhere. Of these the commonest are the hemispherical 'button' pearl, flattened on one side, perhaps by contact with the shell, and the hollow, irregularly shaped 'blister' pearl. Small pearls generally, whether round or deformed, are called 'seed' pearls, which is an English term. They are sold by bulk, and are used for grinding into medicinal powders, or as decorative beading for women's dresses in India and Persia.

The experts of the Persian Gulf assert that the largest, whitest, heaviest and most perfect pearls are obtained in deep water, while the shallow beds, though prolific, yield pearls of less specific gravity and invariably tinged with a shade of some colour. This stain of colour they attribute to the influence of the light of the sun, and they hold that there is a tendency to distortion in pearls grown between islands and the mainland, and that deep water is favourable to perfect sphericity as well as to lustre and to the other qualities
228 which give the pearl its value. The Arabs estimate the fineness
425 of pearls by an imaginary number of 'coats'. They say that the Karachi pearl has only one coat, the Ceylon pearl three, the Red Sea and Sokotrah pearl five, while the ordinary pearl of the Persian Gulf has no less than seven. The truth is, of course, that the pearl forms on the shell in layers or skins, rather like an onion. Pearls can be skinned, and a poor-looking specimen may be found to have a perfect interior.

Pearls exceeding thirty grains Troy in weight are seldom obtained in the Gulf, and the smaller sizes are numerous in proportion to their smallness. One of the finest Persian Gulf pearls on record was found in 1867 in sixteen fathoms of water near the island of Sheikh Shu'aib; it was purchased by a merchant for 15,000 Qrans, sold in Paris the following year for £8,000, and

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

was eventually purchased by a Baniyah and brought to India to make an eye for an idol. In 1899 a native of Mumzar, a subject of the Sultan of Oman, found a valuable pearl which he sold to the Sheikh of Sharjah for £2,000. This gave rise to litigation lasting for several years and almost ended in war between the Sultan and the Sheikh. Eventually the pearl reached Bombay where it was valued at 400,000 rupees. The matter was referred to the Arab court, or *Majlis*, which gave judgment in favour of the Sultan, ruling that he was entitled to the net price received by the owners. The pearl, after remaining unsold for some time in London, was brought back to Bombay and disposed of there for 1,000,000 rupees. The Sultan's share should have been 30,000 rupees but, owing to the cost of litigation and mortgages, he had to content himself with 12,000 rupees.

Hassan was one of many of the Arab pearl merchants who make a living by acting as brokers or commission agents; a few own boats and trade direct with India, but the most important men in the pearl trade are the Indian brokers or buyers with headquarters in Bombay. The most influential broker in Oman was Jam Shan, a large, dignified Parsee whose house in Dubai I frequently used to visit. In appearance he was very like the Aga Khan, and was reputed to be enormously wealthy. Before the war he used to travel extensively to Europe and America, and had connexions with Cartier in Paris and London. Persian Gulf pearls sold by Mr. Jam Shan to Cartier were purchased by the Duchess of Windsor for £20,000, and a single pearl which was originally bought for £6,000 was finally sold to Miss Barbara Hutton, the American heiress, for £15,000.

Jam Shan had a single room in his house which he used as an office. He and his assistants used to sit on the floor counting and sorting the hundreds of thousands of pearls (some as tiny as a pinhead) which the merchants brought to him in bagfuls. Exceptionally large and fine pearls, of 30 grains Troy and upwards, he used to buy singly. There is no recognized method of assessing their value, except by the lustre and sheen. The intermediate and smaller sizes, which form the staple of the pearl trade, are valued according to size, weight, colour and shape. Their valuation demands great technical knowledge. Medium pearls are assorted into size by being passed through a series of perforated bowls, called *tasah*, made of brass or copper, which fit into one another,

The *Nakhuda* himself is very seldom free from debt, for the expenses of fitting out and provisioning the boats and of retaining the services of capable divers and making them advances, often as much as 3,000 rupees per season, make him equally dependent on the *Musaqqams*, or moneylenders. Should a *Nakhuda* be unable to pay off his debts, the *Salifat-al-Ghaus*, or 'Diving Court', a tribunal set up by the sheikh of the district, may order his boats to be sold and his divers to be handed over to the creditor, although his house and other personal property is exempt from seizure. Usually, however, the court fixes an annual instalment for the discharge of the debt, and the *Nakhuda* is then free to form relations with another *Musaqqam*, if he can find one willing to finance him in these circumstances. These rules, although drastic, are very necessary to protect the pearling industry from financial loss.

The diving court has other functions, one of which is to enforce the 'laws' of the industry as regards the engagement of labour, rates of interest, supervision of taxes due to the sheikhs, and the maintenance of a standard of quality of the pearls sold in the open market. Dealers who charge excess prices for pearls, or who pass bad or spurious pearls for those of first quality, are severely reprimanded or even suspended from trading, whilst the man who dares to bring a false or 'cultured' pearl into the Gulf is liable to be outlawed by the shaikh.

It is interesting to watch the brokers haggling over a heap of gleaming pearls in the market. It would take the average European several minutes to work out a price, but the Arab merchant, even when otherwise illiterate, is usually a clever mathematician and benefits by the fluctuations of market rates and by the discrepancies of the weighing appliances in use in the Gulf. Some experts, generally sea-going *Tawwashes*, or dealers, profess a power to distinguish roughly the depth of water and even the particular neighbourhood from which a pearl shown to them may have been obtained; thus they assert that pearls from the banks near Bahrain are marked by greater lustre, and those from banks further northward by greater 'solidity'. They all possess an uncanny ability to sum a pearl up at a glance, and the success of the individual trader depends chiefly upon his power to appraise the relative fineness of pearls belonging to the same class, and he has no set rules to assist his judgment.

The largest pearls are sent to India to be sold individually by the *chau*; but, in the assortment of the remainder into packets—

each packet containing pearls of the same class, but not necessarily of the same size—the ingenuity of the dealer finds further scope, for each of such packets, if skilfully made up, commands a higher price than the pearls comprising it would obtain if disposed of separately. Dealers are consequently averse from breaking up their packets and a fancy price must generally be paid for a single pearl selected from a packet of which the remainder are not taken.

The sheikhs of the Arab littoral derive considerable revenue from the pearl fisheries, but only as a means of taxes imposed on their subjects or on traders resident in their territories. The Trucial Oman sheikhs are also entitled to receive a share in the sale price of any pearl worth £50 or more which may have been found by one of their subjects, but no particular share is specified. The tax is called *Taraz*, and is sometimes assessed at the rate of one diver's share for each boat, and the sheikh is supposed to provide out of this revenue the services of watchmen to guard the towns and villages while the able-bodied males are absent. The *Taraz* is a poll tax on operatives and the *Nob*, also collected by the sheikhs, a tax on boats. Much confusion is caused by irregularity in collection of the taxes, the people always endeavouring to pay as little as possible and the sheikhs to take as much as they can, and that in advance. It is not surprising that the profession of tax-collector is highly unpopular in Arabia.

The rights of the pearl fisheries are very jealously guarded and the operatives are protected by the British Government. Only Arabs and the subjects of the sheikhs are allowed to undertake pearl diving in the Persian Gulf, and foreigners, diving suits, and any form of mechanical device are strictly barred. The effect of competition with Europeans furnished with scientific appliances and the use of deep-sea dredging, would tend to destroy the colonies from which the oysters upon the shallow beds accessible to native divers are recruited. Moreover, the appearance of European rivals would arouse great animosity on the part of the Arabs, who regard the fisheries as their common but exclusive inheritance, and for this reason alone the British Government has always opposed foreign entry—even that of British subjects—into the Gulf pearling industry.

In spite of Government opposition, however, the lure of the pearl trade has proved too great to prevent attempts by foreigners to compete in the industry, and several syndicates have been formed in the past with a view to exploiting the beds. Permission to